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ABSTRACT

This book provides easy-to-follow procedures for producing a play in an elementary school classroom. The book discusses choosing a play, casting, coaching, costumes, sets, and props. The process described in the book begins with simple creative exercises that can be done easily in class, and then moves on to small group activities that continue to develop expressive and social skill abilities as well as boost self-confidence. After an introduction, sections of the book are Play Production...Just for the Fun of It; Videotape vs. Stage Production; Choosing the Play; Creative Expression; Developing an Original Play; Casting and Coaching; Costumes, Sets, and Props; The Final Act: The Performance. An appendix presents 4 plays--the first developed by a group of sixth graders using the methods in the book, and the remaining three developed primarily to teach values and manners in special education and remedial reading classes but suitable in regular classes as well. Contains 13 references. (RM)

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*Creative Experiences
for
Stage or Video*

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The
**Elementary
School Play**

Marilee J. Platke

High Noon Books
Novato, California

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Dedication

To the children . . .
those who inspired me
those who participated
those who will benefit in the future.

Acknowledgment

Many thanks to my entire family for their support and encouragement during the time devoted to this project, and very special thanks to my husband, Bob, whose help made it all possible.



Introduction



If you have been wanting to try drama in your classroom, but you are afraid your students might not be ready for it, this is the book for you! You will be surprised at how well your students can handle their parts if they are chosen carefully to suit the child, or written specifically for each member of the cast. The purpose of this book is to provide you with a step-by-step guide to play production, within your own classroom. Whether you prefer to develop your own plays, or use the scripts provided in the Appendix, you will be guided through the entire process—start to finish.

The "ready-made" plays, titled "So Proudly We Stand," "A Day to Remember," and "The Other Side of the Law," were written primarily for students in special education and remedial reading classes, but they would work equally well in the regular classroom. The subject matter was chosen for the purpose of teaching values and manners in a way that will be far more meaningful to the children than the usual methods of reading and answering questions, or listening to lectures. Although the plays were written specifically for video tape production, they can easily be adapted to use on the stage. Instructions are included for both types of production. For the teacher who would prefer to involve his or her students in the actual writing of the play, guidelines are provided for the entire process, beginning with the first steps in developing the idea for the play, to the final production. The play, titled "The Spoiled Princess of Rainbowland," which is also included in the Appendix, is an example of what children can do when they are given the opportunity to use their own creativity. The play was developed by a group of sixth-graders, using the method described in this book. They performed this play, on stage, once for the student body, and then again for their parents, with excellent "reviews."

Whether you choose to use one of the plays provided, or write your own; whether you videotape the final production, or have your students perform on the stage before a live audience; you and your students will be rewarded with the realization that they can do it! Not only will they have succeeded in producing a successful play, but they will have acquired reading, social, and other skills that will more than make up for any class time used for rehearsals.

Play Production . . . Just for the Fun of It?

Some teachers are reluctant to spend class time working on plays because there is pressure from parents, administrators, and the general public to "teach Johnny or Janie to read." Although your students may think that working on a play is just a fun activity, it is important that you, as a teacher, realize how many areas of learning are affected by drama and play production. Your enthusiasm may be an important factor in convincing others of the value of your project.

While it is true that a great deal of time is required to complete the whole process and produce results that everyone will be proud of, it certainly is not time wasted. In fact, with careful planning, students can benefit even *more* from the production of a play than they might from regular reading lessons. So, if you are wondering when you will be able to squeeze rehearsals into the regular class schedule, there is no need to feel guilty for using class time!

The ideal time to use is the reading period. Drama is a wonderful way to spice-up your reading curriculum, without sacrificing any of the components you usually cover. Whether you choose to involve your students in a full production complete with costumes and scenery, or just have them dramatize a story from their basal reader, you will find them to be highly motivated to learn.

One very valuable side effect of drama in the classroom is vocabulary development. Students are exposed to a variety of new words and have the opportunity to recognize them visually, as well as learn their meanings. Reading comprehension follows quite naturally, as they begin to act out their roles. Even those who are not acting at a given time can benefit by reading along silently. Comprehension can be further enhanced through class discussion of the events in the play. Understanding the sequence of events, which is a difficult skill for some children to learn, can also be taught through drama.

Whether or not the parts are to be memorized, oral reading skills will be further developed as children begin to try to read their parts in such a way as to make them sound natural and believable. Speed of word recognition will increase automatically with the practice that is required. Punctuation will also become more

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meaningful, because students will start to realize how punctuation relates to our spoken language, and why it is so important to punctuate written language carefully and correctly.

Another time period that can be very useful for play production is the social studies period. Any subject that deals with people and their social or cultural development will provide a theme for a play that is both interesting and educational for your students. There are innumerable historical events that can be easily portrayed, making history far more meaningful to students than the conventional learning methods.

In addition to academic skills, there are many other ways in which your students can benefit from drama and play production. For example, if you were wondering how you were going to work prevocational skills into your curriculum—look no further! Many important aspects of prevocational training are covered automatically during the process of planning and producing a classroom play.

For example, putting together a play will provide your students with opportunities to learn to work with others as a team toward a common goal—a very important prevocational skill. Unfortunately, some traditional teaching methods tend to separate children, rather than encouraging them to work together.

Another vitally important skill—following directions—is extremely difficult for many children, particularly those with learning disabilities. All the lessons in following directions you can find in books will not be nearly as effective as the experience they will have in preparing for the final production of their play. They will soon learn the importance of listening and following directions because they will realize that the play simply cannot work unless everyone follows directions.

Self-concept development is another important aspect of prevocational training that is a natural result of experience in dramatics. Children in special education and remedial reading programs, in particular, very often have extremely low self-esteem. They have experienced failure to the point at which they believe that they will never succeed in doing anything worthwhile. With careful planning, these children can experience success through drama, and begin to realize their own potential. The increase in self-esteem will come not only from the child's own feelings of accomplishment, but also from the positive reactions of others.

Memory can also be enhanced through drama. The ability to memorize lines varies greatly from one child to the next, but memory can be improved through training. Even children with severe memory problems can, with enough practice, learn a few short, simple lines. Being part of such an important project will provide the incentive the child needs to put forth the extra effort to learn his lines.

Creativity is one aspect of the educational process that very often gets overlooked. We get so involved in trying to teach the basic skills that it is sometimes difficult to find time to allow for creativity. Children need opportunities to use their imagination, in order to make learning more exciting and meaningful. For example, it would save a lot of time and energy to hand students a script and start rehearsing; but if those same students are able to share in the process of writing their own play, it will be a more rewarding experience for them.

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Drama also provides an excellent vehicle for the exploration of feelings and emotions. The opportunity to "become" someone else allows a child to express feelings in a way he or she may not ordinarily be capable of.

In addition to all of the academic and social skills your students will acquire through drama, they will also be learning a great deal about the technical aspects of producing a play!

Videotape vs. Stage Production

If you have access to a video camera, by all means, take advantage of it! You'll find it to be one of the most useful and innovative teaching tools you've ever tried.

Children who would normally be too shy or inhibited to perform on stage before a live audience are more likely to be willing to participate in a play if they can do it in their own classroom. Videotaping provides that opportunity. The entire process can be completed without requiring the children to perform before an audience.

Some children really enjoy performing on stage, and for them it can be a very rewarding experience. But for those who are shy or feel inhibited in the presence of an audience, the idea of taking part in a play can be downright terrifying. In fact, it's something they probably wouldn't even consider, if given a choice.

Videotaping, on the other hand, provides the opportunity to produce a play in its entirety within the privacy of the classroom. This method is especially effective in remedial reading or special education classes where students lack the reading skills and confidence in their own abilities to perform before an audience. With careful planning and lots of practice, they can perform successfully before the camera.

When they view themselves on television, they will be amazed at their own accomplishments. These same students, who were once reluctant to perform for an audience, will suddenly be most anxious to show the tape to others. The positive reactions of those who view the tape can be extremely valuable in building self-esteem, compared to some otherwise negative effects that can result from having to perform before a live audience.

The creative talents of special education students very often go unnoticed by their regular teachers in the struggle to help them achieve academic success. The opportunity to observe these children on videotape can be a very positive experience for teachers who, otherwise, may not have recognized creative potential in their students.

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Another advantage of videotaping a play, as opposed to stage production, is the simplicity of scenery and props required. Since the taping can be done as close to the subjects as desired, there is less need for elaborate sets. Only a few simple items are needed, for most scenes, to give the desired effect. Unlike live presentation, moreover, in taping, more time is available to set-up each scene, without hurry. Also, many scenes can be shot "on location," in or around the school grounds. Very simple backdrops and special effects can be designed for use in the classroom, which cannot be done as effectively on a stage with a live audience.

Still Prefer a Stage Production?

For those who prefer to have the final production performed for an audience, the video camera still has an important role to play. By taping rehearsals, for example, the actors can critique their own performance and see for themselves where improvement is needed. Seeing themselves as the audience would, will increase their awareness of how they must present themselves in order to be heard and understood.

While coaching a young group of students, you will find yourself saying, over and over, "Speak louder; don't turn your back to the audience; don't stand behind anyone else." From students' positions on stage, it is difficult for them to realize how they will appear to an audience. The videotape can demonstrate to them what the audience will see and hear; this will make your job as a director much, much easier! As the work progresses, your students will be able to observe their own improvement, which should help boost their confidence.

Whether or not the camera has been used for rehearsals, you may want to consider the possibility of videotaping the actual performance. First, it will provide an opportunity for the actors to see how they appeared to the audience. Second, there will be a permanent record of your class play to be viewed by future classes. A copy of the tape could even be placed in the school library. Copies could also be made available to parents—maybe for a small profit, as fundraising for some special class activity.

For teachers who are interested solely in the dramatic aspect of play production, and prefer not to involve themselves at all in videotaping, there may be a parent who would be willing to tape the play. Video cameras are becoming as commonplace as 35 mm cameras were a few years ago. At special events such as graduation, band concerts, and the like—anywhere children are found on a stage—you will see parents setting up their video cameras.

Operating the Video Camera

Modern technology has provided us with video cameras that are extremely easy to operate. Even if you have never used one before, there is no need to be apprehensive about your first attempt. If you rent a camera, or use one that belongs to your school, someone will be able to show you how to operate the camera in just a

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few minutes. If you must rely on following the instructions in the manual that comes with the camera, don't get discouraged! Once you start following the directions, step by step, you will find that, usually, the camera is much easier to operate than one might guess from reading the lengthy instructions in the manual!

If you begin by getting acquainted with all of the controls you will need to operate, it will make it easier to follow the directions. Find the page that shows where all of them are located on the camera. Then begin working your way through the directions, step by step. You will be amazed at how easy it is.

Many home video cameras are available with automatic focus, zoom lenses, and automatic exposure control. Once you have checked all the buttons to be sure they are in the correct position for auto control, all you have to do is aim and shoot. And that wonderful result is an instant recording of your subject matter . . . no waiting for developing! Also, scenes can be shot and re-shot over the same tape, just as in audio cassette recording.

Some cameras are equipped with internal title-producing components, which will enable you simply to type in titles and credits at the end of your play. After typing in your title, you push the record button just as you would to tape a scene. If yours doesn't have this particular feature, title-making can be accomplished quite easily by printing your titles on posterboard, and actually taping them with the camera.

Ordinary indoor or outdoor lighting is all that is needed with today's video cameras, so no special lighting equipment is needed. If your light is *too* dim, however, the colors will not be as bright and true-to-life as they would be with adequate light. Just be sure to check the setting on the camera to be sure there will be sufficient light before shooting.

One item that is a must, is a good, sturdy tripod. Supporting the camera on a tripod not only prevents "jiggling" movements, but also makes it possible for the camera to be operating while you simultaneously work with the class. Once the camera is in the proper position for whatever it is you intend to record, you can push the record button and leave the camera unattended until you are able to return to the controls.

The built-in microphone system on most home video cameras will pick up sound very well from several feet away. If you are taping in a classroom, for example, your students' natural voices will carry well enough to be recorded without further amplification. It is extremely important to remember, however, that *any* sound near the camera will be picked up, too, and could interfere with or block out entirely the sound you are trying to record.

Before you begin to use the video camera to record your play practices or your final performance, you will need to decide which method of editing you would prefer to use. Editing a video tape is a different process than that used in editing films. Since you can't cut up a videotape and piece it together until you have the desired effect, you will have to decide in advance which of two methods you might prefer.

The easiest way to edit a videotaped production is to tape only the scenes that you intend to keep. You do this by using the record/pause button at the end of each taped segment. Then, when you tape the next scene, it will appear instantly on the screen without any undesirable "glitches" or picture distortions between shots. The

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disadvantages to this type of editing are that all scenes have to be shot in perfect sequence, and planning is required to make sure you are ready for recording, because—with this method—each shot will be *final*.

The second method makes recording sessions much easier and less stressful, but it requires additional equipment and more training. But don't let that discourage you! A second VCR (video cassette recorder) and cables to make the connections from one recording unit to the other is all that is needed. With a little practice, you can teach yourself how to edit all of your desired sequences onto a new tape, giving you a much more polished final tape. The instruction manual included with the VCR you are using will probably explain how to edit, using this process.

You can also dub in sound without affecting the video portion of your tape. Just keep in mind that, wherever you dub in sound, it will replace the original sound track for that portion of your tape.

For the purpose of using taped segments of rehearsals as a teaching tool, and for taping your final performance, you really don't need to involve yourself in the editing process at all. Just aim, shoot, and enjoy the satisfaction of a job well done!

Choosing the Play

Many different factors need to be considered in choosing the right play for your specific needs. For example, will it be one that is already written, or will the children be writing their own original play? How many parts will be needed? How old are the children who will be in the play? What is their level of ability? How much time can be devoted to preparation and rehearsals. Will it be performed on stage, or videotaped? If it is to be a stage performance, will the audience be children, adults, or both? What kind of costumes and scenery will be needed? How long should the play last? Many problems can be avoided by dealing with questions such as these in advance.

If you have decided that you would prefer to use a play that has already been written, rather than having your students develop their own script, the first step is to decide what kind of play would be the most suitable. The play you choose should be interesting and satisfying to both performers and audience. Since you will be spending a significant amount of time on the production of the play, right up to the final performance, be sure to choose a play with which you are completely comfortable.

Much depends on the age and ability of your students, since they will not only have to be able to read their parts, but also be able to memorize them. The length of the speaking parts must therefore be taken into consideration, as well as the readability level.

Since children sometimes have a difficult time understanding the characters they are to portray, it is important that the performers can relate to the characters and what they are doing in the story. The interest level of the story behind the play should thus be carefully matched to the comprehension level of the child. The more your performers enjoy what they are doing, the more the audience will enjoy the play.

Although you are most likely doing this project for the benefit of your students, it is still important to keep in mind the ages and interests of your audience.

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Parents, for example, will enjoy seeing their own children in almost any type of play; but a general audience of adults and children will expect to be entertained. Your actors need to learn that part of their job is to please the audience.

Most audiences enjoy humor. Even if the theme is a serious one, humor can be interjected from time to time (this is known as "comic relief"). The length of the play should be determined, also, by the general make-up of the audience. If the play is to be performed for a group of small children, for example, it should be very short, in order to hold their interest.

If you choose your play carefully, taking care to consider all of these important elements, your students will enjoy performing, and their audience will respond favorably.

There are many books and magazines available that have entire scripts for you to choose from. Be sure, however, to check to see if you will need permission from the publisher to use the scripts. In some cases, it is necessary to purchase copies of scripts in order to perform the plays for an audience. The plays provided in the Appendix of this book may be used in any way you choose—as is, or changed to meet your needs.

Basal readers are excellent sources for "ready-to-use" plays for the classroom. They are usually short in length, and their readability level is easily determined. These plays can be used as an introduction to drama in the classroom; or they could be adapted for use in a complete production, either on stage or on videotape.

If your play is to be performed on stage, be sure that the play you choose can be done within the space available, and that the necessary scenery can be created fairly easily. Here, it is useful to remember, and use, a rule of classical drama: The production will likely profit from using the three unities of place, time, and action. This is something that must be determined prior to starting rehearsals. It would be disastrous to get involved in preparation, and then realize that some aspects of the play just aren't feasible!

As mentioned previously, one advantage of a video production is that some scenes can be shot "on location," and with the use of simple backdrops and special effects. So, videotaping may be a viable alternative if your students develop an otherwise fascinating play, that is not amenable to stage performance.

Unless you have a generous budget, and plenty of help lined up for this project,¹ you will probably need to choose a play that does not require elaborate costumes and sets. Regular street clothes, combined with odds 'n ends brought from home, will usually work quite well. The children can have fun making some of the props and accessories that may be needed for effect.

The size of your group will automatically eliminate some of your choices. You will need enough parts to satisfy the needs of your group. Sometimes, you can add "extras," who have nonspeaking parts, in order to get more children on stage. This will work especially well for those children who would have a difficult time memorizing lines. Another way to add parts is to redistribute the lines available. For example, in a scene where only a few characters appear, the lines can be divided up

¹If your school has a strong and active parent-teacher-student association (PTSA), it may be worthwhile to approach that organization for volunteers.

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so that there are more children in the scene. In that way, there are more speaking parts to go around, and there is less memorization for each person.

Time for rehearsals is of the utmost importance in choosing a play. To have a successful performance, you will need plenty of time for your students to practice together. Some of them will probably spend very little . . . if any . . . time of their own, working on their lines. You can expect that most memorizing will take place during rehearsals. It's better to choose a short play, and have plenty of time for practice, than to tackle a production that requires more time than is available, and be disappointed with the results.

In trying to determine how much time is available for play practice, you will have to decide whether or not you will be using regular class time for the project. If the play is to be an extracurricular activity, you will need to decide how many times the group will be able to meet before the day of the performance. In this case, students will have to realize the importance of good attendance and punctuality, if their play is to be a success.

If you have decided that you would prefer to have students write their own play, you will still need to consider most of the factors mentioned here. One advantage of writing an original play, however, is that such a play can be written to suit the needs of your group—you don't have to spend time, and possibly a false start or two, searching for one that will work for you. If you are just a little reluctant to take the plunge, the next two chapters will simplify the whole creative process for you!

Creative Dramatics

The term "creative dramatics" usually refers to the process by which children learn dramatics skills—not necessarily for the purpose of producing a play, but strictly for the benefits the child can derive from the exercises alone. Your students can benefit greatly from some of the exercises used in creative drama classes, even though they may be more interested in just "putting on a play" than they are in "serious drama."

It is not necessary for you to be an experienced drama teacher to be able to lead a group in drama. It is important, however, that you organize the time you have available to you, and know your goals and objectives, just as you would for any other lesson you teach. You and your students will enjoy the experience if you know in advance where you are going and what you hope to accomplish.

The exercises described in this chapter are intended to get you and your students off to a good start for a very rewarding experience. You will be amazed at how they will begin to lose some of their inhibitions and learn to express themselves more openly. The exercises are especially important for students who will be developing their own play. Once they rid themselves of their inhibitions (or, if you prefer, "stage fright"), their creativity can flow more freely without fear of criticism from their peers.

Warm-Up Exercises

Even if students are already well acquainted with each other, warm-up exercises will help them to feel more comfortable and provide them with a feeling of unity. It's important that these first exercises are designed for the total group, so that no one will feel left out or shy about participating. The main objective is to provide a positive first experience. There will be plenty of opportunities for individuals to perform after they begin to feel less inhibited. The ideas here are provided only as suggestions to get you started.

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The first exercise can be as simple as clapping hands to a rhythmic beat. As the leader, you will start students out with a steady clapping beat. Once everyone is clapping in unison, you can change the beat at any time, and the group has to follow. This can be done several times. In order to keep enthusiasm high, however, be sure to stop this activity and go on to a new one before students have a chance to tire of it.

The next step could be to add movement to the rhythm. This can be done in a variety of ways, depending upon the age of your group and the space you have available. Perhaps this could be done as part of P.E.

If you are doing this exercise in the classroom, with only the aisles between desks to work in, the children can march in place while they clap, or march up and down the aisles. If you have room to form a circle, they can move together in the circle—to the right, to the left, toward the center, and back. If your group is too large to form a circle, they can line up in rows, and movements will depend on space available. The object of this exercise is to teach the students to move to a rhythmic beat. The manner in which they are lined up is of minor importance. If you have plenty of space, however, it is fun to vary the movements.

There are other movement exercises that can be done while the group is still lined up for the clapping exercise. For example, they can all pretend they are bouncing a ball. Once they are all "bouncing" in unison, they can move right, left, and so on, as they did while clapping.

Pretending to bounce a ball can be used as a bridge to pantomime activities. The first experience with pantomime should still be performed as a total group, until the children feel comfortable enough to perform in a smaller group. Although pretending comes naturally to most children, when it is done in front of others it becomes a *performance*—even if it is just for a small group of peers.

Pantomime Exercises

Any simple, everyday experience can be used for an exercise in pantomime. To help the children understand the meaning of pantomime, simply tell them that it is the same as pretending. Using the previous activity as an example, you can explain that, since they already knew how to bounce a ball, it was easy to pretend. Anyone watching would know exactly what they were doing, because they made it look so *real*.

The next step in pantomime is to begin to practice movements and facial expressions that add realism to the actions. Since the students are still working as a total group, the activities need to be sufficiently simple that each member of the group can participate, with all action taking place at the same time.

Activities such as flying a kite, or trying to catch a frog, or wading through water, work very well as beginning pantomime exercises. You can either discuss the activity first, in order to emphasize particular points to keep in mind; or you can have students do the exercise and then discuss it, repeating the activity, for improvement. For example, if they are going to "fly a kite," you can discuss the steps

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that would actually occur, such as running to get the kite started flying, letting out more string, watching the kite in the air, etc.

Other suggestions for group pantomime exercises include:

- Walking barefoot on sharp rocks
- Walking on ice
- Walking against the wind
- Watching various sports, such as tennis, boxing, horse racing, football, baseball, etc.
- Trying to swat a fly
- Jumping rope
- Painting a house
- Washing windows
- Sweeping
- Walking a dog

The list of possibilities is endless. The main thing to keep in mind when planning pantomime activities for the group is that everyone needs to be able to participate at the same time. Remember, also, to limit the time spent on each assigned activity. Your students will enjoy the exercises much more if you keep it moving, spending only a few minutes on each one before going on to the next situation. These first exercises are very important in building the interest and abilities for future activities.

A lesson on feelings and emotions should be included before you move on to pantomime in small-group situations. Practice with facial expressions can be done as a total group warm-up exercise at the beginning of the period during which you plan to divide the class into small groups.

This will be your opportunity to introduce the concept of acting, and how it compares to pretending. Since children have usually had plenty of experience at pretending, they need only to realize that acting is the same thing—except that acting is done for an audience. For that reason, students will need to keep in mind that part of their job as actors is to make the audience understand what they are doing or who they are trying to be.

Practice in showing emotion will make students more aware of the importance of becoming deeply involved in whatever role they are portraying. When practicing facial expressions, simply have students sit at their desks or in a circle on the floor, and tell them they can use *only* their faces to show the emotions.

Starting with an easily expressed emotion such as happiness, have them change to portray sadness, surprise, disappointment, anger, pride, etc. It may be necessary to offer suggestions on how to express some of the emotions, depending on the ages of your students. Encouraging them to think about a situation they have experienced may be helpful, especially if they are having trouble expressing certain emotions.

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Small-Group Exercises

When your students are ready to begin working with partners and small groups, you will find the results to be far more effective if you, rather than they, make the decisions concerning who will work together. Breaking up small cliques is necessary in order to get everyone in the group working together. If you do the choosing yourself, you can arrange the groups so that each person works with a different group during each session, until everyone has had the experience of working with everyone else.

You will soon discover that some of your less talented students will benefit greatly from working with those who are either more creative and talented, or who have at least had more experience in dramatic activities. It may be that what appeared to be lack of talent turns out to be simply lack of experience. If allowed to choose their own partners, those students may never have the opportunity to "come out of their shells."

One excellent warm-up exercise for partners is called "The Mirror Exercise." It is a fun activity that teaches the ability to concentrate. One of the partners is the "mirror," and has to mirror-image copy the movements of the other partner. After a given period of time, the partners change roles, so that each has the opportunity to be the mirror. The easiest way to organize this activity is to have the partners sit cross-legged on the floor, facing each other. They will soon realize the importance of moving very slowly and concentrating on each other's movements. Children really seem to enjoy this exercise. It can be quite fascinating if done correctly. Participants need to be cautioned not to wait until after the other person moves, but to move simultaneously, so that someone watching would have trouble guessing who is leading.

When you feel your students are ready to perform for each other, divide them up into groups of three or four, and assign each group a situation to pantomime for the rest of the class. Providing each group with an index card on which you have written a description of the situation will give them a frame of reference while they are planning their performance. Send the small groups to various corners of the room and allow sufficient time for them to work out their plan. Give them advice only if asked.

For added interest, the class can guess what the situation was that was acted out. This makes it a fun activity while also providing a means of evaluating the realism of the performance. If the "audience" can guess right away what the performers were trying to do, they will know their performance was a success. If they have trouble guessing, the actors might try again with suggestions from you on how they could make their performance more realistic.

This activity can be done in a variety of ways. To encourage creativity, you can present students with a problem situation to which they must add a solution. Another time, you could suggest key characters, and students would have to build a situation around them; or you could present just a theme, and students would have to develop everything from there. This activity is an important step in developing creativity. The more the students do on their own, the more valuable the experience will be for them.

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Here are some hypothetical situations to get you, and your students, started:

1. *At the Bakery:* One person is behind the counter, waiting on customers. Three people are the customers, who can't decide what they want. At first, the clerk is very friendly and patient, but he or she gets tired of the customers changing their minds. What happens next?
2. *At the Photo Studio:* Three people are members of a family having their pictures taken (mother, father, child). Every time the photographer is ready to take the picture, the child does something. What happens next?
3. *In the Classroom:* One person is the teacher. The rest are students. The teacher is trying to write something on the chalkboard. Every time the teacher turns his or her back to the class, something happens. What happens, and how does the teacher handle it?

Any simple, everyday situation will work quite well. In fact, it is important to keep it simple, so that students can relate to the situation and know how to react. After a few experiences in group pantomime activities, your students will have overcome some of their shyness and be ready for individual situations. The following ideas are ones I have found to work quite well, but you will probably think of many, many more, once you get started. They are presented as they would appear on index cards.

1. You are baking a cake. Add all the ingredients. Put the cake in the oven. Set the timer and go read a book. Suddenly
2. You are flying a kite. It gets caught in a tree. What happens when you try to get it out?
3. You are cold. You build a fire. You have trouble getting it started. Finally, you get the fire going, and
4. You are a blind person, walking down the street with your dog. You come to a busy street corner, and
5. You are building a snowman. When you finally get finished, just as you start to walk away, the snowman taps you on the back. He has come to life. How can you make everyone understand that the snowman came to life?
6. You are eating soup in a restaurant. Suddenly, you look down and see
7. You are watching a movie. You are really enjoying the movie until someone in a big hat sits down in front of you. How will you solve the problem?
8. You wake up in the morning and look outside. It has snowed during the night. What do you need to put on to go outside? What happens, once you are outside?
9. You are grocery shopping. You are unable to reach something that you want very much. How do you finally get it?
10. You are choosing foods in a cafeteria, putting them on your tray as you go. You have trouble finding a place to sit. About the time you finally spot an empty seat

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After a few sessions of pantomime activities, the students will probably begin to ask when they can start speaking. That will be a good indication to you that they are ready to try characterizations and improvisations. Just be sure that they have had enough experience in pantomime so that they have learned the importance of facial expressions and body movements in creating realism in a given situation, before going on to add speech to their situations.

Improvisations and Characterizations

Once your students have had several experiences with pantomime activities, it will not be difficult at all for them to move into improvisations. In fact, it will probably be a relief for them to finally be able to speak.

For their first experience in adding speech, students can use the same situations they used for pantomime. This will simplify the activity for them since, basically, the actions have already been worked out and all they have to do is to figure out what to say. They may be a little reluctant, at first, because this will be a new experience, but the words will soon begin to flow naturally.

New situations can be assigned once students have overcome the initial awkwardness of having to create their own speaking parts. As before, groups can be sent to various parts of the room for a few minutes of planning time before they present their act to the rest of the group. Improvisations are meant to be spontaneous experiences in drama, so allow only enough time for groups to decide who is to do each part, and just a very basic plan of how the skit will be done. Speaking parts should be spontaneous.

Pictures, slides, newspaper articles, and poems can be used to get ideas for situations to act out. Also, everyday problems on the playground provide an excellent source for ideas.

To elicit maximum creativity in your students, try presenting them with a variety of unusual objects. Assign a number to each object, and have each group of students draw a number to see which object will be theirs. Each group will have to develop a story about their object, after deciding what it is, where it came from, how it got there, etc. After they have made up a story about their object, each group will act it out for the rest of the class. This activity can also be done quite effectively with common, everyday objects, as long as the students are told that the object can be represented as anything except what it really is!

Before moving into characterizations, a warm-up exercise in changing moods can help increase students' ability to express themselves. They need to be aware of how quickly moods can change in a play—just as in real-life situations. You can begin this activity by simply telling students which emotion they should express, and shortly thereafter have them change to another (such as happiness, followed by sadness).

To extend the activity further, after several different mood changes, you can set up situations for different groups to act out. Each situation should include at least one mood change, such as fear of what is causing a strange noise, and the relief in finding out that it was just a cat outside the window. Another situation could be

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the excitement of a class field trip, which changes to disappointment when the school bus breaks down. These activities, which are just reenactments of mundane events, will help students realize the relationship between acting and reality. The emotions they will be acting out are no different from those they have probably all experienced at one time or another.

Characterizations can be introduced by your talking about how people in a play are referred to as characters. The ages of the children you are working with will determine to what extent you wish to become involved with terminology. You can begin by giving the total group an example of a character to portray. For example, if students are all seated at their desks, you could suggest that they pretend they are very old, as they get up from their desks and walk over to where the next activity will take place. Before they begin, you may want to ask them to think about how an old person would get up, stand, and walk. Some students may be reminded that old people do not jump up quickly! This same activity could be repeated using other characters, such as a teenager, a model, or a small child.

Pictures or slides of various characters are useful in getting children started in developing characters. To begin, you could lead a group discussion about a picture of a particular character. Ask questions such as "What is he doing? How old do you suppose he is? Does he have a family?" and so on. Of course, students won't really be able to answer all of the questions based strictly on what they see in the picture; but you can encourage them to make up a story.

Once you have shown them how to develop a character from a picture, a group activity could be centered around pictures of various people. Each member of the group could portray a different character, making up a story about the people, and putting on a short skit for the rest of the group.

As you can see, there are many ways to encourage creativity, while at the same time teaching dramatic skills that can be put to use in the actual production of a play. These skills are extremely important, whether your students will be developing their own original play or choosing one that has already been written. The ideas presented in this chapter are intended only as examples to get you and your students started. The possibilities are unlimited, once their creativity is unleashed!

Developing an Original Play

Guiding children through the play-writing process is not as difficult an undertaking as it may seem. Once students have taken part in some of the activities described in previous chapters, and they have overcome some of their inhibitions, they will be ready to put their creativity to work. The degree of guidance required from you will, of course, depend on the ages and skill levels of your students.

Ideas for a play can come from a variety of sources. If you are working with children in the intermediate grades, for example, you may want to consider a brainstorming session during which they will all be able to express their ideas. Everyday problems or situations at home, newspaper articles, familiar stories and poems, or even pictures and slides can be excellent story-starters. All they will need is a very simple story to get them started.

Children must be cautioned not to make judgments about anyone else's ideas during brainstorming or group discussions. Everyone must be able to speak freely and let the ideas flow. Once ideas have been expressed, the group will be able to gradually select the ideas that will work best; this must be done in such a way as to avoid making anyone feel that his or her ideas were "dumb" or "silly." It must be understood from the beginning that not all ideas can be used, and that some will have to be set aside, even though they may actually be very good ideas. It can be pointed out that some ideas are more practical than others to use, regarding sets, costumes, etc. Sometimes an idea can be altered slightly in order to make good use of it. The important thing to remember is that creativity will not flow naturally if students are afraid of what someone might say.

Once they have decided on the basic story, or theme for a story, group discussions will help develop it into a complete form. The groups will need guidance from the teacher during this process. Again, such things as the ages of the children, their skills, and the size of groups will determine the extent of guidance needed.

One suggestion for intermediate students is to divide them into smaller groups, and have each group develop the story separately. Then each group can tell their story, and the class as a whole can decide which version(s) they prefer to use.

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You might prefer to get your class started by telling them only the beginning of a story, and letting them finish it. This method is especially effective with younger children. It is also very useful when there is a particular theme you have in mind. In that way, you will be encouraging their creativity and still be able to cover the subject you have in mind. For example, you might want students develop a play that would teach a particular value, such as honesty. If you tell your class a brief story about a child who has no friends because he always tells lies, you can then present them with the task of finding a solution that would finish the story.

It is important that you have a plan in mind, no matter how much you want to leave up to the children. You will have to make decisions about how much time will be devoted to the play, how long it will last, what kind of scenery and props would be possible, etc. The children do not need to be aware of your basic plan, which is for your benefit, mainly for arranging for time and available materials.

If you have a particular theme in mind, and you prefer to have the children use their own creativity from the very beginning, use stimulus pictures or slides to start a discussion going in the right direction. Pictures of interesting people can be used very effectively in developing a story around the characters. Once children get started, their own experiences will provide plenty of ideas.

Flexibility is a *must*! Things may not go exactly as you planned, once the children's creativity takes over. Your job will be to keep progress within your general plan, while still allowing children's creativity to flow. Children are natural story tellers, and they are not bound by the same limitations as adults. As far as they are concerned, anything is possible in a story!

You may need to provide some guidance at this point, to be sure your students have the necessary knowledge of the basic components that make a story or play complete. The extent of this particular lesson will again depend on the ages and abilities of your students. Younger children need only to know that a story must have a beginning, a middle, and an end. The beginning explains to the audience what the story is about. The middle is the main part where most of the action takes place, usually because some kind of problem exists. The end portrays how the problem was resolved.

With older students, you may wish to go into more detail, and also introduce various dramatic terms. Terms you may discuss with your students include, but are certainly not limited to, the following:

- Prologue
- Elaboration
- Digression
- Plot
- Subplot
- Comic relief
- Climax
- Anticlimax
- Epilogue

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- Conflict/resolution
- Chorus
- Hero/heroine (protagonist)
- Villain (antagonist)
- Metaphor
- Symbol
- Theme
- Three unities (time, place, action)
- Realism
- "Stock" characters

Whether or not students learn to understand and use all of the correct terminology, they must grasp that every story has a plot. A story must be "about something," and the audience has to be able to recognize what that something is. Most children watch enough television to be able to relate to this concept when it is explained. Most of the time, the plot is a conflict that must be worked out. There is a protagonist (hero, heroine) and an antagonist (villain). The conflict between these two characters, and how the conflict is resolved, is what the story is "about."

Some children are such good story-tellers that all the necessary parts are included without any prior knowledge of what those parts are. In fact, you may want to point out the parts of the story *after* your students have developed it. It may be effective to let the story take shape among the students, and then, by questioning and guidance, lead the students to supply any major story component that may be missing.

Once the story outline has been agreed upon, students can begin to develop the characters; which will eventually lead to the actual writing of the dialogue. As the characters begin to emerge, the story will automatically become more completely developed. At this point the story could be written out, as a point of reference. It may undergo several changes before it becomes a script.

If your students have already had exercises in improvisation and characterization as described in the previous chapter, you will be able to move into the next step easily. Students will have already overcome some of their inhibitions, and will be eager to begin work on the characters for their play. Dialogue will develop more naturally if students are unaware, and so unselfconscious, about creation of dialogue being the purpose of the following exercise.

Using a tape recorder or a video camera during the exercise will be very helpful, because some of the best lines are those which come spontaneously. Having those lines readily available will simplify the process of writing the dialogue into the script.

A group discussion of how some of the characters might look, how they might walk, or how they might act, will get the group thinking about particular characters. You can then ask for volunteers to demonstrate, giving their interpretations of the characters. As this exercise continues, the group will be able to decide, in

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a democratic fashion, which interpretation best satisfies the requirements of the role.

Next, you can divide the class into small groups and assign each group a card on which you have written out a situation from the story. Students will act out the situation, providing their own dialogue as they go. The entire story can be acted out in this manner from start to finish, or you can simply choose short parts without any particular sequence. The important thing here is to develop the characters and to elicit dialogue. Each group should be given the opportunity to try different situations, so students can understand the relationship of one scene of the action to the others.

This activity, incidentally, provides a good opportunity for you to get an idea of who may be best suited for some of the parts, once the script is completed and the cast is to be chosen. It likewise gives students some notion of what parts they might want to try out for.

If you have access to a video camera, now is a very useful time for it, because the students can view the tape of their improvisations and discuss their dialogue. Once again, decisions will have to be made about which lines will work best. More lines may have to be added to clarify actions, or gratuitous lines will be discarded. In any event, students viewing the tape will be putting themselves in the "audience's shoes."

A rough draft of a script can now be written—either by a committee, if the students are old enough, or as a total group led by the teacher. Once the rough draft is completed, it can be read aloud to the group, thus providing an opportunity to make whatever changes are needed. Even once the script is completed, there may still be a need to make changes. Sometimes the wording may not seem natural to the person who must deliver the lines, or it may be that parts have to be added or deleted due to a change in the number of students in the class.

In most cases, working with elementary-age children, the teacher will be responsible for the final steps in the writing process: checking for the necessary parts that lead to proper development of the plot and a smooth conclusion, sentence structure and word usage, consistency in characterization, and the actual typing of the script for production.

The process of developing the play from their own story is a fun experience for children. Although they usually enjoy all of the exercises leading up to this point, the ultimate goal is still that of "putting on a play." The writing of the script is an exciting, tangible step toward reaching their goal.

Casting and Coaching

Whether you use a "ready-made" script or have your students write their own play, sooner or later you will have to choose the right people to play the right parts. This can be a difficult chore at times, depending on the ages of the children with whom you are working, and upon their individual interests and abilities.

Casting for an elementary school play can be accomplished in a variety of ways. The method used may not be as important as the manner in which the situation is handled. While trying to meet the needs of the play, you will also have to deal with the feelings and attitudes of your children.

Although type-casting works extremely well in the theatrical profession, it is not advisable for the elementary school production. While type-casting may be tempting, for the purpose of realism, the danger of the negative psychological effect on the child must be the prime consideration.

There are some circumstances in which appearances should be considered. For example, size differences can be a determining factor for casting characters of a certain age. Adult parts are generally most effective if portrayed by the larger children of the group.

Care must be taken in casting ethnic characters, to be sure students chosen will not be offended by the particular role. For example, if you have a Black student, it may upset him (or his parents) to be cast in the role of a servant. Problems of this nature must be handled diplomatically and dealt with on an individual basis. Attitudes of the students and the community will be determining factors.

The teacher can, of course, assign parts based on age and ability. Although this may not be a very democratic method, it may be advisable in certain circumstances, such as a special education class, or when you are working with very young children.

Another method is to offer "open casting," so that everyone has a chance to try out for a variety of parts. In this case, students should have a chance to read over the parts in advance. The readings can be done for you or for the total group, depending on which decision-making process you have chosen. If you prefer the more

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democratic method, whereby the group votes on their choices, a discussion about the characters is advisable before the ballots are cast. This allows you to point out what will be required for each part, thereby providing students with some guidelines for the decisions they make.

It's always difficult to predict in advance who will be most suited to a particular part. Children are full of surprises, as every teacher knows. Although a child's actions may be very predictable in the classroom during normal activities, he or she may react in an entirely different manner when portraying someone else in a play. If you must choose between two or more people for the same part, you might ask them to try out again, perhaps on a more difficult scene.

If your students are developing their own original play, tryouts will be much easier. While students are developing the characters and creating the dialogue, each player will begin to get a feel for which character he or she is best suited to play. Also, you will have been able to observe, well in advance of the tryouts, each student's ability, or natural affinity for this or that character. One great advantage in this method is that students will also recognize when someone else is more suited for a given character, particularly if you have videotaped sequences of character development and dialogue creation. They will have had the opportunity to observe themselves in comparison to each of the other members of the group.

Most younger children seem to be satisfied quite easily, as long as they know they will get a part, even if that part is not their first choice. Sometimes parts can be "equalized" by adding a few lines here and there, especially if students are writing their own play.

In a regular classroom, it would be extremely difficult (although not impossible) to arrange for each child to have a part. Most likely, however, there will be some who prefer not to appear in the play, and who would rather work on sets and props. If you run into a situation where a very large number of students really want parts in the play, one suggestion is to add nonspeaking parts; or, maybe a "crowd scene" could be added. If your play is a musical, you have the option of adding a chorus or a group of dancers.

Once the cast is agreed upon, and scripts have been distributed to each member of the group, you will need to set up a schedule for rehearsals. You may want to wait until you have had several practice sessions before you set the dates for the dress rehearsal and the performance. Preparation time varies greatly, depending on the length of a play, complexity of the individual parts, the time available for rehearsals, the maturity of the students, and many other unexpected delays that could occur along the way.

If your play is for a specific occasion, such as a holiday, allow several weeks for practice, keeping in mind that, probably, most memorizing will be done during rehearsals, not at home. If you are using class time every day to practice, you will be able to complete your project in less time than if you are meeting after school twice a week.

As you have probably guessed by now, the teacher wears many hats during the production of an elementary school play. The hat you will wear at all times, and the one that carries with it the most responsibility, is that of the director. As director, it will be your duty to turn a group of inexperienced elementary school children into

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accomplished actors—at least in the eyes of their parents—within a very short span of time.

The overall success of the play depends on the ability of the cast to convey to the audience the full meaning of the story. In order to accomplish this, students will have to portray the characters clearly and understandably for the audience. Although it is unlikely that your young players will be ready for the Broadway stage, if they can hold the attention of the audience and convey the message of the play as it was intended, you'll most likely have a smash hit! How do you accomplish all this? It isn't really as difficult as it may seem; however, it will require some coaching from you.

If your students have written their own play, they should know their characters fairly well and be familiar with the dialogue right from the start. Even if you are using a pre-written script, the class discussions you lead can increase students' awareness of what each character is actually like, and how he or she should be played. The ideal time to have these discussions is before tryouts, so that by the time rehearsals begin, everyone has a basic understanding of the characters. Further development will occur as the work progresses.

At first, students will be so busy reading their lines from the script, that it will be difficult to do much of anything else. During that time, however, you can encourage players to put some *feeling* into their lines. You can work on diction, enunciation, projection, tone, and so on. If one of the roles, for example, calls for the character to whine, help that student to develop the proper whiney tone of voice as called for by the lines. Conversely, prevent your players from developing bad acting (or, for that matter, public speaking) habits, such as reading too fast, or in a monotone.

As the actors become more familiar with their lines, you can begin to pay more attention to body movements, gestures, and facial expressions. Most likely, you will have to point out that, when people speak to each other in real life, they usually look at each other. Encourage your students to talk as if they are the real people in a conversation, actually listening to one another. Also, you might point out that people sometimes think while they are speaking, causing an occasional hesitation or pause—in their play, a pause for dramatic effect.

Encourage the players to make natural gestures while speaking. In some cases, to avoid confusion, actors should avoid walking and talking at the same time. It is just as effective if they move across the stage, speak, move again, then speak, etc. All gestures and movement should have a purpose, however, and should be as natural as possible.

No one should just sit or stand idly on stage. Let actors *do* something that fits in with the action at the time. Activities such as knitting, drying dishes, tidying up a room, arranging flowers, etc., keep the actors' presence on stage visually interesting to the audience while furthering the plot.

Children are naturally good at pretending; and yet, when they get a script in their hands, and the spontaneity is no longer there, they seem to freeze up and become like robots! Frequent use of the word "pretend" seems to work like magic! Suggesting that they pretend to be the person in the play really seems to help them become more natural in their movements and facial expressions.

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The sooner your students begin to memorize their parts, the sooner they will start to feel like the characters they are portraying. You may find that this transformation takes place before your eyes, since most memorization, except in cases where the parents are taking an active part in their child's role-learning, will take place during rehearsals at school.

Allowing occasional ad libs will also help create a more natural effect. The ability to ad lib could save the play from disaster during the actual performance if someone forgets a line, and the players are all able to ad lib and go on without causing an embarrassing lull.

Next, is "blocking." It's extremely important for each member of the cast always to be aware of his or her position on stage. Students need to be aware of how the scene will appear to the audience. If each person watches to be sure he or she is in clear view of the audience, it will be very helpful (this prevents one actor from "upstaging" another). And, unless the action specifically calls for it, an actor should never turn his or her back to the audience. Meanwhile, too, students need to be aware of their positions relative to furniture, props, and sets in a given scene. A videotape is very beneficial in this regard. "Seeing is believing."

Whether or not you have access to a good microphone system, your actors will need to learn to speak as clearly and as loudly as possible, without losing the tone of voice appropriate for the role. This takes a lot of practice; again, videotaping during the blocking will help students evaluate how well the audience will be able to hear them and understand what is being said.

Practice will be needed to improve the timing, the rhythm and cadence of dialogue. The actors need to know when to hesitate, and when to respond quickly to someone else's line. Also, if the play will be performed before a live audience, actors must learn to wait for the applause or laughter of the audience to subside before delivering the next line.

Some students may need more individualized help, aside from regular rehearsals—particularly those students who are sensitive about being corrected in front of the group. Extra practice will give them more confidence during regular rehearsals.

Much of your rehearsing can be done in the classroom, as long as the last few rehearsals are on stage (if it is to be a stage production). Just be sure that entrances and exits are executed as they will be on the stage. Small props should be used as soon as possible in the blocking, to provide plenty of practice in handling them in an easy and familiar manner.

If you have an adult to help you supervise, some members of the group can be working on props and sets, while others practice their lines. This plan is especially helpful for those who have very small parts. It will keep them busy while they wait for their turn. It will, likewise, enable you to devote the necessary time to those who have longer parts to learn.

This very simplified approach to directing and coaching is intended not for the purpose of training students for theatrical careers, but for the purposes of enriching the school curriculum and providing children with an experience they will never forget.

Costumes, Sets, and Props

Although it would be wonderful to have elaborate costumes and sets to give the school play "that professional touch," all that is totally unnecessary for the success of your play. Costumes consisting of ordinary clothing and accessories brought from home, and very simple sets, are all that is needed.

During the initial planning stage, it is important to keep in mind what will be required, whether the final performance will be a stage production or videotaped on location. If you are operating on a low budget and with very little adult help, as is frequently the case, you will have to choose a play, or your class will have to write a play, that does not require a lot of special costumes and scenery.

It's amazing, what can be done with ordinary street clothes to create costumes that are very effective! For example, a boy can wear a lady's blazer as a sport coat for a part in which he plays a grown man. "Mom's" dresses can be pinned, basted, tied with belts, or taped up from underneath, to be made smaller or shorter in length. A little girl can easily be transformed into an adult by simply adding jewelry, maybe a hat or a shawl, and makeup.

Lenses can be removed from old reading glasses or sunglasses to be used as glasses for a character. Inexpensive Halloween wigs can be used for white or gray hair. A scarf around the wig will hold it on and cover up real hair.

Many items, such as long dresses, gloves, and other accessories, can be purchased at second-hand stores very reasonably.

Unusual costumes can be fashioned from crepe paper, which can be glued, or sewn by hand or machine. Felt is also very useful in making costumes. It can be cut and sewn together without hemming, and, although it is more costly than crepe paper, it holds up much better. Your choice will depend upon the type of costume you need and, of course, the size of your budget.

Papier mâché can be used to make just about anything you might need in the way of props or special masks. All you need is a basic shape made of wire or crushed newspaper, a good supply of newspapers, and some wheat paste. Using strips of torn newspaper dipped in a mixture of water and wheat paste, the basic form is covered,

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layer by layer, until you have reached the desired thickness. When it has been dried and painted, you will have a very sturdy finished product.

Unusual and hard-to-find items can be created by rolling layers of newspapers into long tubes, and then bending them into the desired shapes. They can also be used as extensions on existing furniture. For example, you can create a throne by taping newspaper rolls onto the sides of an ordinary straight-back chair. They can then be shaped to form a high back, in any design desired. For added strength, two or more rolls can be taped together. When the design is completed, the newspaper rolls can be painted or covered with strips of crepe paper. This method is described in detail, along with many other suggestions for making costumes and sets, in *Putting On the School Play*, a book by Adrienne Kriebel Holtje and Grace A. Mayr. This book is listed with other sources in the References of this book.

Scenery will have to be designed according to your individual needs. If you are planning a videotape production, you may be able to shoot "on location," which virtually eliminates some of the problems encountered in planning a stage production.

Sets and scenery do not have to be elaborate, in any case. All you really need is a simple backdrop and a few key props to give the desired effect. Once the actors appear on stage, the audience will be concentrating on them, not the scenery. How you design your backdrop will depend greatly upon the way the stage is designed, and upon the abilities of your student stage crew.

One kind of backdrop is created by hanging butcher paper on the back wall, and having students plan their own scene on it. If you need to move the scenery forward, cutting down the depth of the stage, the paper can be taped to a wire that has been strung across the stage. In this case, the painting will have to be done first, before the hanging.

Or, you can eliminate the backdrop entirely. For example, if your scene takes place inside a room, a window made from cardboard can be hung by wire or fishing line from the ceiling. Pictures could also be hung in the same way, eliminating the need for a wall. The audience's imagination will take over, as long as you have provided something to suggest the location of the scene. The same method could be used for an outdoor scene, by hanging clouds from the ceiling.

Many things can be made from corrugated cardboard which is then painted. Trees, for example, can be cut out, painted, and made to stand up by glueing a brace to the back.

Planning for costumes and sets should begin soon after rehearsals are under way, to allow plenty of time to gather all the necessary items and materials. If the children participate in the planning, they will probably take an active interest in sharing responsibility for locating or making the needed items.

The Final Act: The Performance

When the day of the big performance finally arrives—whether it is the final videotaping or a stage production—everyone, including you, will probably have a case of “opening night jitters.” It’s only natural to wonder how it will all turn out. Will everyone remember their lines? Will anyone get sick at the last minute? What will the audience think of the set(s)? Will they know when to laugh? The list of questions could be endless, but you won’t know the answers until it’s all over! So, all you can do is take a deep breath and recap what has occurred in preparation for the big event.

Through exercises in pantomime and characterizations, your students will have learned to express themselves more freely; they will be able to move more naturally on stage; and—you and they hope—they will have increased confidence in their abilities. Whether they have developed the characters themselves, or studied the characters already written into a script, they will have come to know the characters well and learned how to portray them understandably to the audience.

Parts should be memorized well enough so that a few ad libs here and there can keep the play moving without any embarrassing pauses. But, to set your mind at ease, you will probably have a prompter, off-stage, ready to give help if needed.

If you have had a full dress rehearsal, you won’t have to worry about costumes, sets, or props. All of these things had to be available for the dress rehearsal. The dress rehearsal also provides an opportunity to check out the sound system (if you have one available), lighting, and any special effects you may plan to use. Perhaps you’ve even had a “tech rehearsal,” specifically to avoid technical problems.

After the dress rehearsal, costumes should be stored at school, in a central location. If you know that all costumes are at school, you just have to worry about the students arriving on time to change into them!

Students will need to arrive early enough, on that final day, to have plenty of time to change into their costumes at a leisurely pace. Rushing to get ready adds a great deal of stress to an already tense situation. Everyone involved needs to stay as calm as possible. Having everyone in costume with a few minutes to spare will give

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you the opportunity to give your players a reassuring "pep talk" to relax them a little before the curtain opens. How much time to allow will depend on the type of costumes they will be wearing, and the facilities available for changing. Forty-five minutes to an hour should provide plenty of time.

Having a host or hostess to greet parents and pass out programs will help you concentrate on getting everyone in their proper places, their "marks," for the start of the play. This is a good job for a student who did not want a part in the play, or for someone who has a relatively small part. The arrival of the first parents will be your cue to keep all actors backstage, and keep them quiet while they wait for the big moment.

Once the curtain opens and the play begins, you may have the sudden realization that you are no longer in control! Your days of coaching and directing will be over, and you will have to depend upon your actors to carry it through on their own. Your only opportunity to communicate with them will be between scenes—and even then, only briefly. But, most likely, after a few tense moments you will begin to believe that the weeks and weeks of discussions, activities, and rehearsals were well worth the effort. You will suddenly realize that your students have been transformed into capable actors, ready to meet the challenge.

As the final curtain closes, be prepared to go onstage and introduce each player, giving him or her the chance to take a bow and get individual recognition for his or her part in the production. If you have students (or parents) who have been involved behind the scenes with costumes, sets, lighting, music, etc., be sure to give them individual recognition, also. At this time, you may give parents an opportunity to take pictures of their children while they are still in costume.

The "after-play party" is a traditional event that brings the whole project to a close in a relaxed atmosphere. Whether you choose to have light fare such as cookies and punch right after the performance, or a special party just for the cast and crew, it will be a fun time for all. This is their chance to get together and talk about the performance and share their feelings about the experience.

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I hope that, as you have read this text, you will be encouraged to attempt drama and play production in your classroom—and that you will encourage others to do so, too. The ideas presented here are meant only as a starting point on which individual teachers can expand, incorporating their own and their students' ideas into projects that will be rewarding and educational for all who participate.

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Appendix: Four Plays

The Spoiled Princess of Rainbowland

Developed by the Creative Theater Class
Robert P. Ulrich Elementary School

VIDEOTAPE PRODUCTION

LOCATION: *Scenes I and IV:* The first and fourth scenes can be videotaped on location, in front of a large picture window with full-length drapes. High-backed occasional chairs, or dining room chairs, can be used for the three thrones.

Scenes II and III: The second and third scenes can be taped in a young girl's bedroom. In addition to the bed, there should be one chair and a full-length mirror, or a vanity with a mirror.

PROPS: *Scene I:* Some type of a horn will be needed for the Guard. The jester may want something to juggle, such as imitation fruit, which could be placed in a bowl on a table. A portable cassette player and tape will be needed for the Ballerina's dance.

Scenes II and III: Stuffed animals, games, and toys should be set around the room. A hairbrush will be needed for the Princess, and a magic wand for the Fairy Godmother.

Scene IV: The horn will again be needed for the Guard.

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STAGE PRODUCTION

SCENERY: *Scenes I and IV:* A window, painted on butcher paper or made from cardboard, will serve as the backdrop for both scenes, which will take place in the throne room of the palace. The window should have full-length drapes, which can be painted, or real drapes can be hung on the cardboard window. For added effect, a rainbow can be painted on the window to make it look as if there is a rainbow in the distance. High-backed chairs can be used for the three thrones, or thrones can be made from folding chairs by adding lengths of rolled newspapers to form a high back. They can then be painted and decorated with coats of arms or other symbols.

Scenes II and III: These two scenes take place in the Princess's bedroom, which will require a bed with a ruffled spread, a vanity with a mirror or a portable full-length mirror, and one chair. For ease in changing scenes, the same backdrop used in Scenes I and IV can be used for all scenes.

PROPS: The same props will be needed for a stage production as for a video production.

COSTUMES: Long dresses should be worn by all the girls in the play, except the Ballerina. However, dresses worn by the Princess, the Queen, and the Fairy Godmother should be a bit more elaborate than those worn by the Ladies-in-Waiting and the Children. The Ballerina should wear a tutu. The boys should wear tights, if possible, but sweatpants could be used if necessary. A simple tabard can be made of felt, under which the boys can wear long-sleeved shirts. The King should wear a cape over his outfit. The Guard will need a shield, which can be made from cardboard, and he should have a plastic or cardboard sword. A simple collar and hat made of green felt or crepe paper, with bells added, is all the jester will need. The collar can be worn over a warm-up suit. Crowns will be needed for the King and Queen. They can be made from cardboard, painted and decorated with glitter or old jewelry.

CAST:	King	Ladies-in-Waiting
	Queen	Royal Guard
	Princess	Court Jester
	Children	Fairy Godmother
	Ballerina	Princess-as-Queen

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SCENE I

NARRATOR: Once upon a time, there was a little Princess who lived in a beautiful place called Rainbowland. The King and Queen loved their little Princess dearly. They gave her everything money could buy, and they did everything they could to show their love for her. But she did not return their love. She was so spoiled, she could think only of herself.

(Scene opens inside the palace. King and Queen seated on thrones.)

GUARD: (Toots horn to signal the arrival of the Court Jester.) The Court Jester has arrived. He is ready to perform for your Majesties.

QUEEN: Oh, dear. I was so hoping the Princess would be here to see him today.

KING: Well, why isn't she here?

QUEEN: She just wanted to stay in her room. She seems to like being alone these days.

KING: Guard! Fetch the Princess at once and bring her to me.

GUARD: Yes, your Majesty. (Guard exits.)

QUEEN: Oh, dear! I do hope the Princess will not be upset!

KING: You really must stop coddling her, my dear. We have done everything we can to try to make her happy, but all she ever thinks about is herself.

QUEEN: Yes, I know. We must find a way to help her before it is too late. The people of the Kingdom must learn to respect her, for someday she will be the Queen of Rainbowland.

(Enter the Princess, followed by Guard.)

PRINCESS: Yes, Father. Why did you send for me?

KING: The Court Jester is here to entertain us. Your mother and I thought you would like to see him, too.

PRINCESS: I don't want to see that stupid old jester. I don't think he is funny at all. I would rather just stay in my room.

QUEEN: Now, dear. You need to get out of your room and have some fun.

PRINCESS: Do I have to?

KING: Yes, you have to. Sit down and have fun! Right now!

(Princess sits down, reluctantly. King claps his hands to signal to the Jester that they are ready for him. Enter Jester, doing somersaults, etc. Jester can ad lib, making faces, telling a joke that

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has been practiced. King and Queen are enjoying his antics, but the Princess just sits, looking bored.)

KING: (Claps his hands to signal for the Jester to stop.) That will be all for now.

QUEEN: That was just wonderful. (Looks at Princess.) Isn't he funny, my dear?

PRINCESS: If you say so, Mother. I think he is just plain silly. If you don't mind, I'll be going back to my room now.

QUEEN: Please stay, dear. I have arranged for a Ballerina to dance for us. Perhaps you will enjoy her dancing more than you did the Jester.

KING: I hope you will at least be more polite to her.

GUARD: (Toots horn.) The Ballerina has arrived, your Majesty.

KING: Send her in.

(Ballerina enters, curtsies before both the King and the Queen, then dances. When Ballerina finishes her dance, she curtsies, and the King and Queen clap for her. Princess just sits and stares. Then she stands up . . .)

PRINCESS: Now . . . may I be excused?

KING: (Disgustedly) Yes, of course.

(King and Queen look at each other sadly, and shrug their shoulders in disbelief. Exit Princess. Curtain closes.)

SCENE II

(Scene opens with Princess in her bedroom, sitting in front of her mirror, brushing her hair, and admiring herself. Enter Ladies-in-Waiting, who curtsy before the Princess.)

1st LADY: Good morning, your Highness. We have come to see if there is something we can help you with.

PRINCESS: (Without looking away from her mirror) No, thank you.

2nd LADY: (Approaching Princess) Could I do that for you? (She reaches for the brush.) You have such beautiful hair.

PRINCESS: Stop it! You are messing up my hair. I can brush my own hair, thank you.

3rd LADY: (Looking out the window) It's such a lovely day. Would you like to take a stroll through the garden?

PRINCESS: No!

2nd LADY: How would you like to play a game?

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- PRINCESS: No! I do not want to play a game. I just want you to leave me alone.
- 1st LADY: But we were sent here by the Queen to see if we could do something for you.
- 2nd LADY: Just tell us what you want, your Highness. We will do whatever you want.
- PRINCESS: I want you to leave me alone!
- 3rd LADY: (Speaking to the other Ladies) Well, I don't know about you, but I have had enough of this! I'm leaving!
- 1st LADY: Me, too!
- 2nd LADY: I'm ready to quit this new job. It just isn't like I thought it would be at all.
- (Exit Ladies-in-Waiting. Princess watches as they leave, acting disgusted. She walks around her room, as if checking to see that nothing has been disturbed. Soon, there is a knock at her door. Enter Children. They all curtsy or bow.)
- PRINCESS: Yes. What do you want?
- 1st CHILD: We have come to play with you.
- 2nd CHILD: Oh, look! Look at all the wonderful toys she has!
- PRINCESS: Leave my toys alone!
- 1st CHILD: What a beautiful room you have, your Highness! (Reaching out to touch bedspread) I've never seen such a pretty bedspread before.
- PRINCESS: Don't touch my bed!
- 1st CHILD: Why not? I just think it's pretty, that's all.
- 2nd CHILD: He [or She] isn't going to hurt it any.
- 3rd CHILD: Look at her dress! It's so pretty! I wish I had a dress like that.
- PRINCESS: Leave me alone!
- 1st CHILD: Don't you want to play with us?
- PRINCESS: No. I'm busy.
- 2nd CHILD: But, you're just sitting there brushing your hair.
- 3rd CHILD: That's all she ever wants to do.
- 1st CHILD: Let's all play this game. (Picks up game box from among toys.)
- 2nd CHILD: Oh, yeah. That looks like fun!
- 3rd CHILD: Can I be first? I want-a be first!
- PRINCESS: If you don't get out of here right now, I'm going to scream!
- 1st CHILD: All right! We're leaving. (Puts down game box, pretending it is a boring game.)

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- 2nd CHILD: We didn't want to play with you, anyway!
- 3rd CHILD: She is so spoiled. I don't ever want to play with her again!
(King and Queen enter as Children prepare to exit.)
- QUEEN: What's this? What is going on here?
(Children look at the Queen, frightened, for they fear they are in trouble. Queen motions for Children to leave. Children exit.)
- PRINCESS: My hair! Mother, look at my hair. I think it needs another perm.
- QUEEN: Why did you send those children away?
- PRINCESS: They were bothering me.
- QUEEN: But they came here to play with you.
- PRINCESS: I don't want to play with them, and I don't want those Ladies-in-Waiting bothering me anymore, either. You have to talk to them.
- KING: It is you we are going to talk to, young lady. You need to learn some manners.
- PRINCESS: That's the last thing I need. I am too perfect to need manners.
- KING: Perfect? Nobody is perfect, and certainly not you.
- QUEEN: Someday you will be the Queen. Don't you want the people of the Kingdom to respect you?
- PRINCESS: Of course. They will respect me just because I will be their Queen. (Princess exits.)
(King and Queen shake their heads in disbelief. Suddenly, the Fairy Godmother appears.)
- QUEEN: Oh, Fairy Godmother, you have come to help us!
- FAIRY: I don't know if I can help this time.
- KING: There must be something you can do. The Princess is just getting impossible to live with.
- QUEEN: Isn't there something you can do to make her see how miserable she makes everybody?
- KING: And how lonely she will be when she grows up?
- FAIRY: Well, maybe there is something I can do. What are her favorite colors of the rainbow?
- QUEEN: Oh, she really likes red and blue, but her favorite is purple.
- FAIRY: Well, if you will excuse me, I will be off to see the Princess now.
(Scene ends, curtain closes, as Fairy Godmother exits.)

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SCENE III

(Scene opens with the Princess in her room. She is seated in front of her mirror, admiring herself, as the Fairy Godmother enters.)

PRINCESS: (Startled) Oh, it's just you. I thought it was those awful Ladies-in-Waiting again.

FAIRY: I thought they were rather nice young ladies.

PRINCESS: I can't stand them fussing over me all the time. Why are you here?

FAIRY: I have come to grant you three wishes.

PRINCESS: Why? What could I possibly want? I already have everything. Riches, beauty, power . . .

FAIRY: My poor little Princess. You really think you have everything?

PRINCESS: Of course I do.

FAIRY: Do you have happiness?

PRINCESS: (Uncertain) Uh . . . well . . . sure. I suppose it might be amusing to see if you can really grant me three wishes. You can come back when I'm not so busy.

FAIRY: If you want your three wishes, my little Princess, you will have to take them now.

PRINCESS: Oh . . . if I must.

FAIRY: What is your first wish?

PRINCESS: I wish to see myself as the greatest Queen of them all.

FAIRY: As you wish. Lie down on your bed and close your eyes. (Fairy Godmother waits until the princess is lying down.) Now, picture the rainbow, and think about all the beautiful colors. When you can see the red clearly, your wish will come true.

(Enter Princess-as-Queen. Real Princess is sitting up on her bed, watching, as the Queen sits down, takes off her crown, and begins brushing her hair in front of the mirror. Fairy Godmother is also watching. Soon, Ladies-in-Waiting enter.)

1st LADY: Good morning, your Majesty. (As she curtsies.)

2nd LADY: Is there something we can help you with, your Majesty?

P. as QUEEN: No. I just want to be left alone.

1st LADY: (Reaching for the brush) But, your Majesty, wouldn't you like me to brush your hair for you?

P. as QUEEN: No. Now see what you've done. You've messed up my hair. Why can't you keep your hands to yourself?

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- 1st LADY: I was only trying to help.
- P. as QUEEN: Well, I don't need your help with my hair. I certainly know how to brush my own hair.
- 2nd LADY: Perhaps you would like me to fluff your pillows, your Majesty?
- P. as QUEEN: No. I do not want my pillows fluffed! I told you. I just want to be left alone. Now go!
- 1st LADY: She hasn't changed one bit! She is still as nasty as when she was a Princess.
- 2nd LADY: I knew I should have quit this job. She has made me miserable all these years. It is no wonder everybody in the Kingdom hates her so.
- P. as QUEEN: (To herself in the mirror) Why can't people leave me alone? I'm perfectly happy all alone. (She sits for a minute, then begins to cry into her handkerchief.)
(Exit Princess-as-Queen. Princess jumps up from her bed.)
- PRINCESS: Oh, dear. I don't want to spend the rest of my life alone. I wish I could understand why no one likes me.
- FAIRY: Very well, if that is your wish, I will show you. Lie down on your bed again. This time, when you see the color blue in the rainbow, your wish will come true.
(Princess lies down on her bed. She sits up as all the people of the Court begin to enter the room, acting just as she does. They ad lib as she walks about the room, trying to talk to them. She soon becomes very frustrated and upset, because no one will pay any attention to her.)
- PRINCESS: (Crying) Fairy Godmother! Fairy Godmother! Help me, please!
(The people all exit, leaving the Princess and Fairy Godmother alone.)
- FAIRY: Yes, my dear?
- PRINCESS: Why did you send me to that awful place with all those terrible people?
- FAIRY: Don't you know why?
- PRINCESS: Oh . . . Fairy Godmother . . . they were all acting like me, weren't they? Oh, no . . . Please! You have to help me. I don't want to be like that any more.
- FAIRY: Remember, my little Princess . . . you have one more wish.
- PRINCESS: Oh! I wish I could be happy . . . forever and ever.
- FAIRY: Your wish will be granted. Just close your eyes and think about the color purple. When you wake up, you will know the secret of true happiness.

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(Curtain closes as Princess closes her eyes.)

SCENE IV

(Scene opens with King and Queen seated on their thrones.)

QUEEN: I wonder why we haven't heard from the Fairy Godmother yet.

KING: She probably got disgusted and left.

(Enter Princess, cheerfully.)

PRINCESS: Hello, Mother! Hello, Father! Is it almost time for the Court Jester?

KING: (To the Queen) Who is this child?

QUEEN: (To the King) She looks like our daughter!

PRINCESS: I am your daughter!

KING: I don't know what your Fairy Godmother did, but I sure like it!

PRINCESS: She helped me learn the secret of true happiness!

QUEEN: Really? What is the secret of true happiness?

PRINCESS: I know now that if I want to be happy, I must try to make others happy. I want all the people of Rainbowland to love and respect me.

KING: That is wonderful, daughter. (To the Queen) How long do you think it will last?

QUEEN: I don't know, dear. I think we'd better call all the people of the court in here quickly.

KING: You're right. (Claps his hands.) Guard! Quickly! Summon the people to come here at once!

(Enter Ladies-in-Waiting, Children, Court Jester, and Ballerina, followed by the Fairy Godmother. Ad lib greetings between them and the Princess, for the finale. They act surprised, but glad at the news.)

(Enter Narrator.)

NARRATOR: And they all lived happily ever after.

THE END

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So Proudly We Stand

A Play about Patriotism and Respect for the Flag

VIDEOTAPE PRODUCTION

LOCATION: *Scene I:* The first scene can be videotaped on location, using actual bleachers or steps found at the school site, or at a nearby park or playing field.

Scene II: The second scene can be videotaped within the classroom, using the teacher's desk and chair in their usual setting.

PROPS: *Scene I:* Team pennants can be made for the Fans to wave. A portable cassette player and a tape of the National Anthem are needed. A tape of crowd noises is optional.

Scene II: Books and papers should be left as they normally would be on the teacher's desk. The flag should be positioned so that it will be visible. A script could be placed on the teacher's desk as an aid for the child playing the part of Mr. Goodman.

STAGE PRODUCTION

SCENERY: *Scene I:* A background of faces can be painted on butcher paper to represent the crowd at the game.

Scene II: A teacher's desk, a chair, and a portable chalkboard will be needed for Mr. Goodman's room. The flag should be displayed in a stand near the desk.

PROPS: *Scene I:* Benches need to be positioned to look like bleachers; or, chorus risers can be used if they are available. A cassette player and a tape of the National Anthem are needed. Pennants for the Fans and a tape of crowd noises will add to the effect.

Scene II: Books and paper should be stacked on the desk.

COSTUMES: Adult clothing and accessories will be needed for the two Ladies and Mr. Goodman. Those playing children's parts can wear regular school clothes. If extras are used in the bleachers, they could be dressed as adults or children.

CAST:	1st Lady	Joey
	2nd Lady	Marsha
	Tom	Patty
	Mr. Goodman	Extras (optional) for Scene I

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SCENE I

(The scene opens at a baseball game. The National Anthem is being played. Two boys are playing around, teasing the girls who are standing in front of them. They are all giggling and annoying the adults nearby.)

1st LADY: Psssst! Young man . . . young man! They are playing the National Anthem.

TOM: Huh?

1st LADY: Shhhh! They are playing the National Anthem.

TOM: (Shrugging his shoulders) Oh. (He turns to his friends, giggling. To them) So what?

(Anthem ends. Adults sit down.)

1st LADY: (To her companion) Children nowadays! They have no respect for anything or anyone!

2nd LADY: I know just what you mean. Sometimes I wonder what they are teaching them in school.

1st LADY: It's a waste of taxpayers' money, if you ask me. When I was a girl, we were taught to respect the flag.

(By now, the Children are listening to what the Ladies are saying, and are looking at each other, just a little embarrassed.)

TOM: What did we do wrong?

PATTY: You know.

TOM: I sure don't know. Do you, Joey?

JOEY: We were just having some fun. I don't know why she got so huffy about it.

MARSHA: You were having fun at the wrong time.

TOM: What do you mean?

JOEY: She said something about the National Anthem. Maybe she couldn't hear it.

PATTY: Oh, you guys! You really don't know, do you?

TOM: (In a mocking tone) No. I guess we really don't know.

MARSHA: Didn't you notice that everybody else was standing up.

JOEY: Oh, *that*. They always stand up when they play that song.

PATTY: "That song"? That song happens to be "The Star-Spangled Banner."

MARSHA: It's our National Anthem. Don't you care about our country?

TOM: Sure. But why do I have to stand up just because the song is being played?

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- PATTY: That's how Americans show respect for the flag. We stand at attention the whole time the song is played.
- MARSHA: Come on, you guys. Don't try to tell us you didn't know you were supposed to stand up. You go to games all the time.
- JOEY: Oh . . . yeah . . . I guess I knew it, but I never really understood why it was so important.
- TOM: I see a lot of people at games who don't stand up. What about them? Even grown-ups.
- PATTY: I know, but that doesn't make it right. They are supposed to stand up, too.
- JOEY: But why? Why are we supposed to stand up?
- PATTY: Now I'm getting curious about it, too.
- MARSHA: I have an idea. Let's go ask Mr. Goodman tomorrow.
- JOEY: Fine. Now can we watch the game?
- (The scene ends as the rest of the children ad lib answers, such as "All right," "OK," etc., and turn to watch the game.)

SCENE II

- (Mr. Goodman is seated at his desk as the four Children enter. Girls enter first. Boys lag behind, as if they are not too sure that they really want to be part of the group.)
- MARSHA: Mr. Goodman, we would like to talk to you about something.
- MR. G: Sure. What about?
- MARSHA: Well, we were all at a baseball game yesterday, and we . . . sort of . . . well . . .
- PATTY: We kind of got into an argument with these guys.
- TOM: Patty and Marsha said we're supposed to stand up whenever they play the National Anthem.
- JOEY: We thought maybe you could tell us why it's so important to stand up.
- MR. G: Well, first of all, when the National Anthem is being played, usually our flag is being displayed at the same time. We all stand at attention, or salute the flag, to show our respect.
- TOM: That's what the girls told us. We want to know why.
- JOEY: Yeah. Why is it so important?
- MR. G: Oh. I see. Well, the flag stands for everything about our nation—the land, the people, the government, and everything we believe in as Americans. Many people have died to protect our flag and

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what it stands for. When we show respect for our flag, we are honoring not only the flag, but all that it stands for.

MARSHA: Is that why we say "The Pledge of Allegiance" every day in school?

MR. G: That's right. It is sort of a daily reminder to us all, to think about how important our country is to us.

PATTY: Come to think of it . . . the flag is everywhere . . . games, parades, schools, offices . . .

TOM: Yeah . . . I see it everywhere I go, but I never really paid much attention to it before.

JOEY: Me neither.

MR. G: Maybe the four of you would like to write a special report about the flag to share with the rest of the class.

MARSHA: That's a good idea!

ALL THE REST: Marsha! Thanks a lot!

THE END

THE ELEMENTARY SCRIPTS PLAY

The Other Side of the Law

A Play about Respect for Law Enforcement

VIDEOTAPE PRODUCTION

LOCATION: *Scene I:* Videotaping can be done anywhere outside, preferably near a bicycle rack.

Scenes II and III: The second scene requires a location that has livingroom-type furniture. Since videotaping can be done fairly close to the actors, all that is really needed is a couch or chairs, such as usually can be found in the teachers' lounge. Taping will only take a few minutes.

Scene IV: The last scene takes place outside, anywhere that is convenient for videotaping.

PROPS: *Scene I:* A bicycle is needed for Claire.

Scenes II and III: A few household items, such as a lamp, a vase with flowers, etc., should be used in the livingroom. A telephone is needed for the Mother in Scene II, and a pad and pencil for the Police Officer to carry in Scene III.

Scene IV: A bike will be needed for Jim, in addition to the one used in Scene I for Claire.

STAGE PRODUCTION

SCENERY: *Scene I:* A background can be painted to resemble the school playground.

Scenes II and III: A livingroom scene can be created by painting a window with drapes for the background, and using occasional chairs and a small table.

Scene IV: The scenery used in Scene I can be used again in Scene IV.

PROPS: *Scene I:* A bicycle is needed for Claire.

Scenes II and III: A few household items, such as a lamp, a vase with flowers, etc., should be used in the livingroom. A telephone is needed for the Mother in Scene II, and a pad and pencil for the Police Officer to carry in Scene III.

Scene IV: A bike will be needed for Jim, in addition to the one used in Scene I for Claire.

THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PLAY

COSTUME: Those playing the parts of the children will all be able to wear their regular school clothes. An adult outfit will be required for the child playing the part of the Mother, and a "uniform" is needed for the Police Officer. Depending on who plays the Officer, the "uniform" could consist of a navy blue shirt/blouse or jacket, and navy blue pants/skirt. A badge could be made from aluminum foil.

CAST:	Sammy	Jim
	Claire	Brad
	Mother	Police Officer

SCENE I

(The scene takes place near a bicycle rack, where some children are standing around, talking about their recent experience with the police. Sammy, Jim, and Claire are already engaged in conversation when Brad walks up.)

BRAD: Hey, Sammy, what's the matter with you?
SAMMY: Oh, Old Lady Swanson called the cops on Jim and me.
BRAD: What? What for?
SAMMY: We were just having a little fun.
BRAD: She called the cops just because you were having fun?
JIM: Well, not exactly.
CLAIRE: They broke her window. I saw the whole thing.
BRAD: Did you guys really break her window?
SAMMY: Yeah. We were just trying to see if we could hit her upstairs window with a rock.
JIM: She just had to go and call the cops. They're always bugging us about something.
SAMMY: All these guys ever do is cruise around the neighborhood, looking for somebody to pick on.
JIM: Yeah. They're always yelling at us for one reason or another.
CLAIRE: Maybe that's because you are always doing something wrong!
BRAD: Claire! You're adding to trouble!
SAMMY: Yeah. . . . You'd better watch it, Claire.
BRAD: They are supposed to be cruising around to protect us.
JIM: Sure they are. Then why don't they do it and stop picking on us?
SAMMY: Yeah. Now I have to go home early every day to work around the house to earn the money to pay for the window.

THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PLAY

- JOE: Oh, no. I have to go. See you guys.
(They all say good-bye. Brad and Johnny walk away, in opposite directions. Claire walks over to her bike and starts to get on. Jim walks over to where he left his bike and looks surprised because it is gone.)
- JOE: Oh, no!
- CLAIRE: What's the matter?
- JOE: My bike is gone!
- CLAIRE: Oh, no. Are you sure that's where you left it?
- JOE: (Looking at Claire disgustedly) Of course I'm sure.
- CLAIRE: Then you have to call the police.
- JOE: Are you kidding? No way.
- CLAIRE: Why not? Maybe they can help you get it back.
- JOE: Do you really think the cops are going to help me? They don't like me. They'd be as happy to hear somebody stole my bike.
- CLAIRE: Then what are you going to do about it?
- JOE: Don't worry. I'll get it back. I'll find out myself who took it. Then I'll just take it back.
- CLAIRE: What, lots of luck. I still think you should call the police.
- JOE: I have to go home. (Jim walks away from Claire, then exits.)
- CLAIRE: (Calling after him) Bye. (Claire exits on her bike.)

SCENE 2

- (The scene opens with Jim coming through the door at home.)
- JOE: (Calling) Mom! I'm home! Mom! Where are you?
- MOTHER: (As she opens the door) I'm right here, Jim. What is the world is wrong? And... why are you so late getting home?
- JOE: Somebody stole my bike!
- MOTHER: Oh, no! Where did you leave it?
- JOE: I had it parked in the bike rack at school.
- MOTHER: Did you have it locked?
- JOE: Oh... well...
- MOTHER: What? Did you?
- JOE: I was in a hurry this morning.
- MOTHER: Oh, Jim. I can't believe you would leave your bike unlocked. You know it isn't safe. I have warned you and warned you....

THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PLAY

- JIM: Mom, I'm sorry. I really was in a hurry and I just plain forgot.
- MOTHER: Well, it's too late now to worry about that. We have to call the police.
- JIM: That's a waste of time. They won't do anything about it.
- MOTHER: What makes you say a thing like that? That's their job. That's your worst life hack?
- JIM: Of course I do. But they won't going to help me. That's wrong. I'll find out who did it. I'll get it back myself.
- MOTHER: Jim, I know why you don't want me to call them. You got into trouble, and now you are ashamed to ask them for help.
- JIM: Oh, go ahead and call them if you want to, but I bet they won't even try to find it.
- (Mother walks over to the telephone and begins to dial, as Jim leaves the room, looking disgusted.)

SCENE II

- (Scene II opens in Jim's livingroom, where he is seated with his Mother and the Police Officer.)
- OFFICER: Oh, Jim. Tell me exactly what your bike looks like, and where you left it.
- JIM: It is red with a white streak, no numbers, and ... oh, yes ... it is a ten-speed.
- OFFICER: Is there any kind of special mark on it that would help you prove it is yours?
- JIM: Ah ... no ... I can't think of any, but I have the key for the lock. Would that help?
- OFFICER: You bet it would. Officer writes down the information, and then stands and walks toward the door. I can't guarantee that we'll find your bike or the person who stole it, Jim, but I promise you that we will do our best.
- JIM: (Disbelievingly) Oh, look.
- MOTHER: Giving Jim a stern look. I'm sure you will, Officer. That's all we can ask. We appreciate your help--don't we, Jim?
- JIM: Oh, yeah ... sure. Thanks.
- (The scene ends as the Officer exits, saying good bye to Jim's mother. She closes the door, then turns to Jim and quietly looks at him with her hands on her hips.)

THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PLAY

SCENE IV

(Brad, Claire, and Sammy are standing near the bike rack, talking, as Jim rides up on his bike.)

BRAD: Hey, Jim, I see you got your bike back! Where did you find it?

JIM: I didn't. The police found it.

SAMMY: The police! I thought you said you weren't going to report it.

JIM: Well, my mother insisted on calling them. Now I'm glad she did. You wouldn't believe how nice the Officer was. He [or She] even brought it over to my house.

BRAD: Wow! That's great! I guess they aren't so bad, after all—huh, guys?

CLAIRE: I could have told you that!

SAMMY: (Disgusted) Oh, Claire.

JIM: Well, anyway, I decided that the police really do want to help us. We just have to give them a chance to do their job. I'm going to stay out of their way from now on.

THE END

THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PLAY

A Day to Remember

A Play about Responsibility—To Self and Others

VIDEOTAPE PRODUCTION

- LOCATION:** *Scene I:* The first scene can be videotaped in any classroom, using the existing student desks, teacher's desk, chalkboard, etc.
Scene II: The second scene can be videotaped on the school playground.
Scenes III and IV: The last two scenes should be taped in the same location as the first scene.
- PROPS:** *Scene I:* Use existing books, papers, chalk, etc. A buzzer will be needed for the school bell.
Scene II: Tape the scene near playground equipment for added effect. No special props are needed, except for the buzzer for the recess bell. Jackets and hats will be needed if the play is to take place during a cold season. (This will be determined by the occasion chosen for the party.)
Scene III: Use existing books and papers, as in Scene I.
Scene IV: In addition to the items used in Scenes I and III, you will need cookies, punch, paper cups, and napkins, and a table to put them on.

STAGE PRODUCTION

- SCENERY:** *Scene I:* Desks, chalkboard, etc., arranged to look like a typical classroom.
Scene II: Background scenery painted to resemble a playground.
Scenes III and IV: Classroom setting, as in Scene I.
- PROPS:** *Scene I:* Use existing books, papers, chalk, etc. A buzzer will be needed for the school bell.
Scene II: No special props are needed, except for the buzzer for the recess bell. Jackets and hats will be needed if the play is to take place during a cold season. (This will be determined by the occasion chosen for the party.)
Scene III: Use existing books and papers, as in Scene I.
Scene IV: In addition to the items used in Scenes I and III, you will need cookies, punch, paper cups, and napkins, and a table to put them on.

THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PLAY

COSTUMES: There are no special costumes required, except for the part of the Teacher. Those playing student parts can wear their regular school clothes. For the Teacher, a few well chosen accessories will add to the effect. If the Teacher is female, these could include some jewelry, a wig if available, and high-heeled shoes. If the Teacher is male, these could be a false moustache, tie, etc. In either case, a pair of glasses (without lenses) is suggested to complete the "teacher look."

CAST:	Teacher	Ted
	Susan	Nancy
	Johnny	Anne
	Tammy	

SCENE I

(The scene opens in a classroom where the Teacher is having a talk with Susan about her forgotten homework. The Teacher is seated at the desk. Susan is standing nearby. Other students are seated at their desks, working.)

TEACHER: Last Friday, I sent make-up work home with you to do. Where is it?

SUSAN: At home.

TEACHER: Susan, that was your last chance to make up the work you forgot all last week. How could you forget something so important?

SUSAN: I can't help it. I just forgot.

TEACHER: You are going to have to be more responsible, Susan. I'm going to have to give you an "F" for the work you did not do.

SUSAN: Yes, Ma'm [or Sir]. (She walks to her seat.)

TEACHER: (Standing, facing the class) We need to make some plans for our class party.

(Teacher picks up a piece of chalk, and writes "Volunteers" on the chalkboard.)

Who would like to bring some cookies?"

(As Teacher writes the word "Cookies" on the chalkboard, several students raise their hands, very enthusiastically. Teacher begins to call on them.)

Ted . . . ?

TED: My mom makes really good cookies. I know I can bring some.

TEACHER: Good. (Writes Ted's name on the board.) Anne . . . ?

THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PLAY

- ANNE: I think I could bring some cookies. I'll check and see. Can I let you know tomorrow?
- TEACHER: That will be fine. The party won't be until Friday. Nancy . . . ?
- NANCY: I can bring some, too.
- TEACHER: OK. (Writes Nancy's name on the board.) That should be plenty of cookies. Now for the punch. (Students raise their hands.) Let's see. We need to choose someone who is not bringing cookies. Johnny?
- JOHNNY: I can bring the punch.
- TEACHER: How will you get it to school? You usually ride the bus.
- JOHNNY: My mom doesn't work on Fridays. She can bring me.
- TEACHER: OK. But don't forget to check with your mom ahead of time to be sure it's all right. (Teacher writes Johnny's name on the board.)
- JOHNNY: OK. No problem.
(All hands are down, now, except Tammy's.)
- TEACHER: Yes, Tammy. Do you have a question?
- TAMMY: I can bring some punch, too.
- TEACHER: Oh, good. That will give us plenty of punch. Now we just need someone to bring paper cups and napkins.
- SUSAN: (Raising her hand impatiently) I can do that. I can bring cups and napkins.
(Other students ad lib comments to show their objections. They begin to whisper to each other about how she always forgets everything. Teacher puts his [or her] finger to lips to quiet them.)
- TEACHER: OK, Susan. (Teacher writes Susan's name on the board.) Now, don't forget. Everybody will be counting on you. Well, I think that is everything we will need for the party. (Recess bell rings.) Let's line up for recess.
(Students stand and exit as if they were going out for recess. Teacher follows.)

SCENE II

(The scene opens in the middle of a conversation among a few of the children during recess.)

- TAMMY: I can't wait 'til the party, can you? It's going to be fun.
- JOHNNY: Yes, but I don't know why our teacher let Susan be the one to bring the cups and napkins.
- ANNE: Yeah. She always forgets everything.

THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PLAY

TED: She can't even remember her homework, after she spends all that time working on it.

NANCY: I bet she doesn't even remember to do it. She probably just says she forgot, so she won't get yelled-at.

(Susan enters, looking at the group like she knows they were talking about her. She stands off to the side, looking sad. The bell rings before anyone has a chance to say any more. They all exit as if to be leaving the playground to return to class.)

SCENE III

(The scene opens back in the classroom. Children are seated at their desks, working. Teacher is seated at the teacher's desk. Teacher looks up and sees that Susan has her head down and is crying. Just about then, the bell rings.)

TEACHER: Class is dismissed. Susan, I would like to talk with you for a few minutes before you go.

(All students exit, except Susan, who remains seated at her desk.)

(Walking over to Susan's desk) What seems to be the problem, Susan?

SUSAN: Nothing.

TEACHER: Come on, now, Susan. I know something is bothering you. It might help if you talk about it.

SUSAN: Well, it's just that . . . Well, the other kids were talking about me at recess, and they don't think you should have let me be the one to bring cups and napkins for our party.

TEACHER: Why do you suppose they feel that way, Susan?

SUSAN: I don't know . . . Maybe they just don't like me.

TEACHER: Do you remember this morning, when I was talking to you about your homework?

SUSAN: Yes.

TEACHER: And I told you you were going to have to be more responsible?

SUSAN: Yes.

TEACHER: I wasn't just talking about your homework when I said that. The other children are probably afraid you won't remember the cups and napkins, because they know how often you forget your homework.

SUSAN: I won't forget. I promise.

THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PLAY

- TEACHER: Susan, you always say that. If you want people to believe you, you will have to start trying harder. Why don't you try writing yourself little notes to help you remember.
- SUSAN: OK. I'll do that. I'll write one right now about the cups and napkins. (She reaches inside her desk for paper and pencil.)
- TEACHER: And your homework?
- SUSAN: Yes. That, too.
- TEACHER: You'd better get going now. I'll see you tomorrow.
- SUSAN: 'Bye. See you tomorrow.
- (Susan picks up her books and exits. Teacher goes to the teacher's desk and sits down.)

SCENE IV

- (It is now Friday, the day of the party. The scene opens in the classroom. The students are sitting in their seats. They are restless. Teacher is standing, facing them.)
- TEACHER: OK. You can all clear off your desks and get ready for the party! Those who brought things, can put them on this table. (Points to a table nearby.)
- (Ted, Nancy, and Anne take their cookies up to the table. Johnny and Tammy take their punch and put it on the table. Suddenly, they all look at each other when they realize that Susan did not put the cups and napkins on the table.)
- TED: Teacher! The cups and napkins!
- SUSAN: Oh my gosh! I forgot!
- NANCY: Oh, no!
- JOHNNY: I knew this would happen!
- SUSAN: Not I mean I forgot I brought them. Here they are. (She takes a paper sack out from under her desk, and rushes up to the table to put them out.)
- (Students all begin to clap and yell. They ad lib, "Yea, Susan!" etc. Susan just smiles proudly as she returns to her seat. She takes some papers out of the same paper sack, and puts them on Teacher's desk. Teacher joins the children in clapping.)
- TEACHER: Susan, that's wonderful! You even remembered your homework. Now we can really enjoy our party!

THE END

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